

Here is what we do know: COVID appeared in the vicinity of the Wuhan Institute of Virology, a laboratory where studies were being conducted on bat coronaviruses. After the outbreak began, Chinese officials ordered the destruction of coronavirus samples. In the months just prior to the first case of the new pathogen being publicly identified, researchers at this state-run lab reportedly became sick with COVID-like symptoms.

Years ago, U.S. officials who visited the institute sent warnings back to the State Department that studies were being conducted on dangerous coronaviruses from bats that could be transmitted to humans in a lab which had “serious” safety problems.

Some of that research was even being subsidized by U.S. taxpayer dollars, including a study published less than 2 years before the pandemic that found the first evidence that humans could be infected with coronaviruses from bats. You heard that correctly, folks. Your tax dollars were paying for dangerous studies on coronaviruses in a lab in China that our own government officials had warned was unsafe.

This all raises many questions, the first being, How much were we actually paying for this endeavor? And that should be relatively easy for anyone to discover since a law renewed by Congress every single year requires all projects supported by the Department of Health and Human Services to include a pricetag disclosing the cost paid by taxpayers. But noticeably absent on the study from the Wuhan Institute: the cost.

A review of numerous other projects supported by HHS found that cost information was missing from all of them—all of them. Covering up information that the public has a right to know about might be how things work in Communist China, but it isn't how it should work here in America.

This isn't China, folks. Our laws aren't optional, especially for those who are supposed to be enforcing them.

Maybe we can't force China to be forthcoming, but we should be able to expect our own government to be open and transparent. That is why I am asking the HHS Office of Inspector General to launch an investigation to compel the Department to comply with the law.

I am also introducing legislation to require every project funded with your taxpayer dollars to disclose the cost paid by you. This is just one of the bright ideas to shine some light on how your money is being spent that I will be unveiling this week to commemorate Sunshine Week, the annual celebration of open government.

A transparent government is one of the most fundamental principles that make our government—of the people, by the people, for the people—work. Decisions are made every day in Washington that impact families and communities in Iowa and across the country.

We all benefit when we bring this information to light, especially when it involves how our tax dollars are being spent. That is why I am also working to create an alert system to notify the public whenever a project goes \$1 billion or more over budget or falls 5 years behind schedule.

Some good news: My bipartisan bill was just reported out of committee this morning, so boondoggles, you better beware.

Another bill I will be supporting will require hospitals and insurers to reveal rates to patients before they receive their medical care. This commonsense effort would allow patients to know the costs associated with their healthcare in advance so that they can make informed decisions for themselves and their families.

Finally, I am calling for more transparency from the Department of Education when it comes to COVID spending. Taxpayers should be able to see clearly how well States and school districts are doing at spending tax dollars provided to help schools safely reopen.

Knowledge is the power that allows every citizen to hold those entrusted to make our decisions accountable. After all, the only reason to keep taxpayers in the dark about any of these decisions is because they can't withstand the scrutiny that results when all of the facts come to light.

With the Sun now setting an hour later as a result of daylight saving time, we are all reminded just how much a difference can be made with a little extra sunlight. After all, sunshine is the best disinfectant because to stop waste, we first need to be able to spot it.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. ROSEN). The Senator from Indiana.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. BRAUN. Madam President, I have come to the floor several times in the little over 2 years I have been here, and a common theme—and I think we all know it as Senators—is that our healthcare system is broken. It is driven by misaligned industry incentives that promote opaque, behind-the-scenes pricing maneuvers at the expense of patients and healthcare consumers.

Increased transparency is the key to fixing our broken healthcare system. It will allow Americans to have skin in the game and deal directly with their healthcare providers to make informed decisions. They cannot do that very well currently.

Pulling the curtain back on a healthcare system to restore market forces, which aren't really there now, to increase innovation and competition, particularly in regard to price, quality, and service—you do that with anything else. A consumer is engaged, they are informed, and you have many competitors competing for their business.

In order for Americans to regain their sovereignty in a healthcare sys-

tem, you need the ability to be able to navigate accordingly. Congress must act to provide Americans with these tools before we try to throw more government at a broken healthcare system.

Government pays for a portion of healthcare; more is paid through the private sector. If we reform it, it makes it less expensive for both payers. To give you an example, sometimes what you hear here sounds like it is theoretical, hypothetical. I took on the cause roughly 12, 13 years ago in my Main Street enterprise that was just starting to grow, doing the things it was supposed to do, and that is transportation distribution. Then all of a sudden, healthcare becomes a subset of your business, and about the only solution you would get each year is, well, you are lucky it is not going up more than 5 or 10 percent.

I heard that too many years in a row. I was sick and tired of that being what I would have to live with as a CEO who had a healthy, successful business other than the healthcare component. What did I do? Healthcare plans are basically made up of three or four features.

You have your deductible. Ours had risen more than I was willing to take it up any higher. The only way you could buy premiums down would be to do that or change underwriters every 2 or 3 years. That gets to be a hassle as you become a larger company, and the profits were so great then for people who did it, you could end up bringing your cost down. Well, then you were right back in the old groove of, you are lucky it is only going up 5 to 10 percent the next year on renewal.

You also have coinsurance. Most people don't worry about that until they get significantly ill or have a bad accident. That is the percentage you have to pay once you exceed your deductible.

When you have those variables, you have one other item that almost everyone loves in their plan, and that is a low copayment. Those copayments are paid for in the high premiums, but it is because they constitute nearly 25 percent of most healthcare plans, and that is to keep skin out of the game for the people who use the system.

Well, I was going to do something different and decided to limit that expense when you really get sick or have a bad accident, covered coinsurance through the company, and asked my employees to engage from dollar one in shopping around and see if that would work.

Lo and behold, it has now been 13 years, and we have been able to keep a good plan in place, lower family healthcare premium contributions, and have not had a premium increase. What is it based upon? It is finding the meager transparency that was out there 12, 13 years ago and enhancing it over time. To give an example, if you pick up the phone, you get on the web, you will find anywhere from 30, 50, 60, 70

percent savings. Procedures like MRIs, CAT scans, colonoscopies can run anywhere from 700 to 3,000 bucks. Your insurance companies seem to always shove you to the most expensive one. They give you these huge discounts, take their margin out of it, and it still costs you a bundle.

When the consumer gets engaged, you will see prices start to come down. LASIK surgery is the best example, where you have no insurance involved. Ten, fifteen years ago, that could be up to \$2,000 an eye. Now, it is advertised heavily, providers go after their customers, and you can probably get it done for as little as \$250 to \$500 an eye, with better quality. That sounds like a lot of other areas of our economy that actually work.

Last Congress, I put healthcare transparency at the forefront of my agenda and have definitely been the most outspoken Senator that we have a broken system; put almost all the blame on the industry itself because it does not give us transparency. It does not want to compete. The healthcare customer is somewhat to blame because they don't want to pay for anything. And I don't think the answer is bringing more government into it until you reform the system.

We need to shine light on the dark corners and the misaligned incentives embedded in the current system. Among the bills I will reintroduce this Congress is the Healthcare PRICE Transparency Act. Every Senator should want to be on that bill to hold the industry accountable. This will empower patients through transparency. It will drive competition among hospitals and insurers by requiring them to publicly disclose their prices so patients can compare between providers and insurers.

Last Congress, a number of my colleagues joined in my effort to bring more transparency and affordability to healthcare consumers. I am excited to reintroduce the Healthcare PRICE Transparency Act soon and hope all of my colleagues will join in so that we can collectively lower healthcare costs before we try to get more government involved.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

SUNSHINE WEEK

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Madam President, I am proud to join my colleagues in celebration of Sunshine Week and promote the importance of government openness and transparency. Transparency isn't something you see too much up here in Washington. Being accountable to the American people should be a basic function of government.

In Florida, we have sunshine laws to promote openness and build our citizens' trust in government. When I came to Washington, I made it my mission to bring the success and transparency we had in Florida to the Federal Government and make this dys-

functional place work for the American people.

Unfortunately, my Democratic colleagues have blocked nearly every single one of my efforts for transparency and requests for information to help Congress make the best decisions for American families.

Last month, I wrote to President Biden's Acting Director for the Office of Management and Budget requesting any documents related to enacted but currently unspent COVID-19 stimulus funding. The response? None. Total silence.

This month, as we considered the Democrats' wasteful and partisan \$1.9 trillion COVID spending package, I introduced a resolution calling on President Biden to inform the Senate and the American people of how much unspent funds are left over from the previous COVID spending bills, but Democrats blocked it.

When my colleague Senator JOHNSON called for their massive, 600-page bill to be read on the floor so the American people could know exactly what was in the bill, Democrats complained and called it a waste of time.

Let me be clear. Being transparent, open, and accountable to the American people is actually never a waste of time; it is our job. That is why I have been working on several measures to bring sunshine transparency to Washington, including my bill to make sure Members of Congress work for the American people and actually read bills before casting their votes and my STOP COVID-19 Act to set vaccine distribution reporting and transparency standards for States and create a program for cities and counties to increase funding, testing, contact tracing, and transparency efforts in order to reduce the spread of COVID.

I will never stop fighting to bring sunshine to Washington and working to make sure our government and the Biden administration are transparent, open, and accountable to the American people who elected us to serve.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. Madam President, I want to start by thanking Senator ERNST for once again setting up the Government Sunshine Week event and for her commitment, as was just discussed by my colleague from Florida, to ensuring taxpayers know where their money is going. This includes the \$150 billion that the U.S. Government distributes every year in taxpayer funds for research grants. More transparency will help ensure that research isn't stolen by China and other countries.

In 2019, as the then-chairman of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, or PSI, I led a bipartisan investigation with then-ranking-member Senator TOM CARPER into China's theft of U.S. intellectual property and U.S. research at our research institutions and college campuses.

As many of you know, China has made no secret of its goal to surpass the United States as the world leader in scientific research. This has become even clearer, by the way, during the COVID-19 pandemic, as China has attempted to get information in the United States to help produce their own vaccines to rival ours. But what most don't know is that China has been using our taxpayer-funded research enterprise here in the United States to accomplish this long-term goal. China uses talent recruitment programs—most notably its Thousand Talents Plan—to recruit researchers at American universities and research institutions using taxpayer-funded grants to do the same research at shadow labs in China or transfer taxpayer-funded research back to China—research that has been used over the past two decades to strengthen China's military and its own economic rise.

Along the way, they have been aided by a lack of transparency in our Federal grant-making process that has allowed researchers to receive taxpayer funding without disclosing their ties to foreign governments. What is worse, Federal law enforcement officials at the FBI knew about this for years and admitted at our PSI hearing last Congress: "We wish we had taken more rapid and comprehensive action in the past." I wish they had.

I am pleased the Trump administration chose to follow through on their promise to do better in this regard. Since our report, prosecutors have charged at least 13 researchers here in the United States for failing to disclose their ties to the Chinese Government and Chinese Communist Party—researchers at prestigious institutions like Harvard and the Ohio State University. Many of our colleges and universities around the country have been part of this.

The Biden administration must stand by the promises made on the campaign trail to keep the pressure on China, and that includes on this issue. We can also help here in Congress by shining a light on the grant-making process and passing laws to help us keep track and protect these important investments in our research.

In the coming weeks, I will be reintroducing bipartisan legislation called the Safeguarding American Innovation Act, which uses the key findings from our bipartisan PSI investigation and report to protect the research enterprise—in part, through more transparency.

First, our bill creates a cross-governmental council at the Office of Management and Budget to coordinate and streamline unauthorized access and grant-making processes between Federal Agencies so that there is greater transparency in where the money is going and how it is being used.

Second, the Safeguarding American Innovation Act makes it illegal to lie on a grant application about ties to